

The Union of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs in an Undergraduate Italian Studies Abroad Program

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When the faculty members for study abroad programs invite student affairs professionals to accompany them abroad, they combine skills and talents to ensure that students' holistic needs are met. The authors were partnered in an Italian Studies summer program in 2001 and 2002, in which the student affairs professional was available to help the faculty members address student concerns and proffer guest lecturing. The authors concluded that this partnership is imperative for future study abroad programs.

Much has already been written about meaningful collaborations for academic affairs and student affairs in higher education. On the 50th anniversary of *The Student Personnel Point of View*, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA, 1987) issued *A Perspective on Student Affairs* in which the academic mission of the institution was measured as preeminent. One belief cited read as follows:

Colleges and universities organize their primary activities around the academic experience: the curriculum, the library, the classroom, and the laboratory. The work of student affairs should not compete with and cannot substitute for that academic experience. As a partner in the educational enterprise, student affairs enhances and supports the academic mission. (p. 9)

However, little or no scholarship exists about student affairs *following* or *accompanying* the academic mission elsewhere. This essay acknowledges the presence of American college classrooms in study abroad settings and the need for a student affairs component. At most institutions of higher learning, student affairs and academic affairs have occupied distinctly different spheres of influence (Hirsch & Burack, 2001). However, at Emory University the director of the Italian Studies program partnered with an experienced student affairs professional to determine if a curricular innovation might be possible. The student affairs professional was invited to join a study abroad program as a guest lecturer and administrator. If Hirsch and Burack (pp. 58-59) suggest that faculty members are unable to provide the time and effort to integrate service-learning into their classwork, then perhaps this social responsibility in a study abroad setting is an important use of a student personnel administrator's work. Further, such a joint effort at providing quality higher education for students

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can enrich cooperation among faculty members and student affairs professionals (O'Brien, 1989). There is a paucity of research regarding American student attitudes about their study abroad experiences in which the faculty members and the student affairs professionals are collaborators at an international study setting. However, there is a rationale for including student affairs in the study abroad work.

A partnership in study abroad settings is a natural expansion for faculty members and student personnel educators. Most connections between faculty members and student affairs are constructed around specific problems, projects, or programs (Brown, 1990). The study abroad concept at Emory is a growing program with growing problems. Within the coming decade, it is anticipated that most Emory undergraduates will enroll in a minimum of one study abroad experience. However, the attitudes, behaviors, and health concerns exhibited by students are generally considered the purview of student affairs when students are on their traditional campuses. It is to the benefit of the college or university for student affairs professionals to join the faculty members so that a seamless learning environment occurs (Kuh, 1996).

If student affairs professionals primarily contend with student behaviors and dispositions on American soil, then the faculty members inherit these obligations upon departing for study abroad situations. However, the faculty members are seldom trained or educated to provide confident response to mental health emergencies, physical health crises, or emotional stress. Some faculty members indicate that they are uncertain as to the most apropos responses to register with disruptive students. It is disingenuous to suggest that students will be free from misbehaviors, emergencies, or counseling issues once they arrive in an international environment. Thus, it is to the benefit of the college or university for student affairs professionals to be introduced to international study and international learning. If granted an opportunity to participate in study abroad, then the student affairs professionals bring their valuable experience in support of student learning, while freeing the faculty members to address other academic issues. Moreover, many American institutions of higher learning are developing strategies that charge administrations, faculty members, and staff with creating synergistic partnerships that provide for the seamless education for all students. Study abroad programs are a potential area for major growth in creating such synergy. At Emory University, the institution nurtures its students by hiring high caliber administrators and faculty members on its primary domestic campus locations. A consistent futuristic rationale is to deliver exceptional faculty members and professionals to international locales to ensure overall student learning. If one concern is that students feel additional stressors when they are exposed to different cultures, languages, and peoples, then the presence of student affairs advocates further ensures that the traveling students cope well with these stresses while outside the United States.

The average American student may be prepared to address some cultural and socioeconomic differences that are distinct from the student's own upbringing and heritage. However, are these Americans abroad fully ready to cope with all of the life distinctions that separate citizens of the United States from other nations in Europe, Asia, Africa, and elsewhere? Again, the faculty members step into the breech to proffer formal classroom learning during study abroad. However, without student affairs support, serious gaps in the students' overall learning can occur. In support of this assertion, Brown (1972, p. 42) concluded, "Until student development concepts and programs are fully integrated with the academic program, the total student notion remains a dream, not a reality." Student personnel colleagues are the appropriate complement and supplement for aiding students in their other adjustments.

Surprisingly, we found no previous research that measured American student attitudes about their study abroad experiences in which the faculty members and student affairs professionals are partnered at an international site. Perhaps this is due to the relatively nascent appearance of widespread international study for American undergraduate students. Teaching faculty members may remain unaware of the contributions made on their campuses by student affairs professionals. Consequently, they cannot forecast how their overseas program can benefit from the experience granted by student affairs participants. Literature reveals that some faculty members perceive student affairs as a secondary contributor to the serious intellectual climate of the campus, resulting in faculty members' omitting student affairs teammates from potential study abroad collaborations. Sandeen (1985) and Kuh, Shedd, and Whitt (1987) among others have observed that a historic divide between faculty members and student personnel exists, yielding divided and improvident institutional structures. The results are far less effective in providing students with the best education (Boyer, 1987).

Additionally, budget constraints delay or prevent cooperative contacts among faculty members and staff in study abroad realms. It can be legitimately challenging for the study abroad program director to allocate salary dollars and staff negotiations to ensure that student affairs personnel are allowed to travel overseas. Interestingly, student affairs leaders have publicly registered little thought to encourage working with students overseas. However, as study abroad offices broaden their appeals to American students, the possibilities of future and effective partnerships should be introduced and discussed.

At Emory, a director of Italian Studies and a student affairs veteran desired to experiment with the partnership of faculty members and student affairs professionals during an annual student study program in Italy. A partnership was created, with one result being the addition of the student affairs administrator to summer study abroad programs in 2001 and 2002. The Italian Studies program had grown rapidly, with enough student enrollment to absorb the costs of an additional staff member. Further, there were issues present from

previous experiences in Italy that were relevant to student affairs leadership and involvement. Despite the surface appearances that Italy is similar to the United States, many previous undergraduate study abroad participants had shown intolerance or discomfort for the distinctions inherent in Italian culture. For examples, students and their parents demanded American-standard and style forms of student housing, advisement, cultural opportunity, and flexibility noted on American campuses. Faculty members are not traditionally educated and trained with the student service demands nurtured in student consumer-centered cultures. Moreover, the documenting of students' inappropriate behaviors is historically a student affairs based duty. Many faculty members were uncertain as to their authority in addressing disruptive actions and statements. Illness, mental health distress, and paraprofessional counseling concerns had surfaced on previous trips, but the lack of administrators forced the use of existing study abroad protocols. Thus, the setting begged for the introduction of student affairs practitioners who have formal and informal training, education, or experience in these areas of human development.

After it was announced to prospective students that a student affairs veteran would join the trip as an administrator and guest lecturer, there was at least one immediate but unexpected gain. The collaboration of the Italian Studies program with the student affairs team enjoyed a marked increase in student registration for the summer program. The director concluded that the student affairs administrators' long-held personal and esteemed relationships with students rewarded the program with enhanced enrollment. These personal relationships and the warm accompanying rapport allow student affairs professionals to market and sell their study abroad programs in a manner that sometimes exceeds the avenues open to the academic or teaching personnel.

Once an itinerary was established for the initial summer collaboration in 2001, the Italian Studies director began to seek approval from appropriate university departments. The director approached the coordinating budget officer for the institution's study abroad projects to support the inclusion of a student affairs administrator. Given the novelty of this proposal, the budget was not approved on the sole basis of student affairs expertise being added; it was noted that the designated student affairs veteran also possessed significant knowledge in Greek and Roman mythology. The knowledge of Greek and Roman deities, their cults, and their myths provided an academic justification for the study abroad budgeting official to grant the additional funding. Thus, the initial marriage of academic affairs to student affairs was successful. However, without the novelty of a veteran student affairs professional with an academic contribution relevant to the Italian program, it is arguable that the presence alone of the student affairs expert would not have justified the funding for this experiment. A future source of research and study will be to determine what benefits students studying abroad derive from the presence and work of student personnel managers, further justifying the expenditures for their participation.

The realities of administrative politics, particularly those that separate the canon from the cocurriculum, were present as the partnership was conceived and developed. It should be noted that the student affairs veteran utilized personal vacation time to be able to accept the invitation to attend and to participate; professional release time was not possible for this initial engagement in Italy. The summer study abroad programs at the institution are a minimum of seven weeks in duration, a long period for a student affairs division to spare a working administrator. Protecting the desired standard of care for students remaining on the home campus must be considered when an administrator is released for study abroad work. Further, student affairs teams utilize the summer seasons to prepare for the upcoming academic season. When important leaders are absent, the combination of advance planning and of alternative arrangements must be developed for the affected student affairs departments.

The summer of 2001 tested the partners' hypothesis that student learning abroad would be positively impacted by the student affairs professional's presence and participation. During the seven week period, the professional exercised seasoned skills in conduct intervention (six incidents), emergency management (student health crisis), paraprofessional counseling (alcohol consumption related), and budget management (overall program expenses). As a bonus, the professional regularly lectured in mythology, a teaching opportunity par exemplar. At the close of each traveling day, the faculty members and professional gathered for dinner, yielding a dividend of appreciative new friendships and rapport to further develop upon return to the home campus. While the student affairs professional engaged with students in the aforementioned manners, the faculty members and the program director were free to teach students and to drive the overall program without distractions. However, the faculty members were quick to demonstrate their own interest and support in the traditional student affairs related areas such as conduct and health emergencies. The faculty members and staff reside with the students in hotels and residence halls. Truly, a full collaborative spirit emerged from the collegial repartee among the faculty members and the student affairs partner. After the contingent returned from Italy in 2001, they registered and approved invitations for continued partnership with the student affairs professional for the summers of 2002 and 2003.

The groundwork has been laid for future interactions. A key question must be addressed for future faculty members and student affairs professionals: How does the student affairs administrator enhance the study abroad experience for students? The presence of faculty members and staff posits that students gain a more well-rounded international experience. The faculty members focus on curricular requirements while the student personnel experts accent the program with assistance in counseling, conduct, wellness, emergency management, administrative functions, and student interaction. Rich territory exists for the

faculty members and student affairs partners to overlap their duties, each exposing the other to their arenas of expertise.

Moreover, it is essential to educate the faculty members to understand and embrace the potential in including student affairs veterans in their study abroad projects. Student personnel practitioners are well aware of student campus concerns: roommate conflicts, conflict resolution, eating disorders, diversity awareness and appreciation, social skill development, community building, student maturation and tolerance development, student governance, personal responsibility and accountability, diplomacy, safety and security issues, overall personal awareness, and other various items. All of these problems exist during study abroad periods, but they are exacerbated by the tensions of new, differing, and alien learning environments. In the absence of a practiced and confident student affairs administrator, the faculty members and their graduate teaching delegates must conduct the confrontations, exercises, and interactions with students that prompt student development in those settings. Student affairs professionals are trained and experienced to handle their students' out-of-class concerns so that they result in positive outcomes for both the student and the program. On the other hand, if these same concerns are handled by faculty members who are not similarly trained and experienced and the outcomes are not good, the institution and the study abroad program are at risk for litigation and negative publicity.

Of course, multiple student issues do not reflect upon the academic strength of a study abroad program. The point is to reemphasize the power in partnership of student affairs and academic affairs working closely to shape the future of the growing study abroad mission. By anticipating issues that future generations of college students will bring to their international learning environments, the student affairs and academic affairs professionals together can ensure greater student development and academic enjoyment.

Another advantage to the study abroad partnership for academic and student affairs is the wealth of programs available to student communities once the faculty members and professionals return to their home campuses. Lectures, stories, photographs, and anecdotes make clever and interesting presentations in residence halls, fraternity and sorority chapter meetings, faculty member gatherings, student organizational meetings, and in marketing the study abroad program. Faculty members and student affairs partners co-present the results of their joint international experiences; a new richness brought back to campus. This is the acceleration of the community of scholars sought in the merger of academics with student personnel advocates.

If more student affairs professionals are invited to international study locations, then those same professionals are better equipped to empathize with arriving international students. This is yet another perceived advantage to the study abroad collaboration. Sensitive and intelligent student personnel professionals will acquire new knowledge about international persons that can be used in welcoming, preparing related programs and services, and aiding in the retention of international students.

There are other potential obstacles to address. The described experiment involved only summer seasons abroad. Many study abroad experiences encompass entire traditional semesters. What staffing and financial sacrifices would be borne by placing student affairs coordinators on international campuses during the academic year? A second issue centers on the development and maintenance of faculty member-student affairs personnel rapport. In the instance of the Italian Studies program and the student affairs administrator, a strong and trusting personal relationship existed before the invitation was extended to join the team. If colleges and universities anticipate that faculty members and professionals will accompany each other overseas, then similar rapport and trust should be built among them. A record of shared experiences on the main campus lays a solid foundation of mutual respect and understanding of each other's expertise and of expectations in performance.

Mutual knowledge and understanding are at the core of the study abroad mission. Fundamental to this concept is the personal and intellectual growth desired for American students studying in international territories. The best study abroad exposure benefits the students by creating an environment in which faculty members and student affairs professionals collaborate proactively and enthusiastically.

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